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FM AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5783  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUFOAOA/USNIC SARAJEVO PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JCS WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SARAJEVO 000686

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR (DICARLO), EUR/SCE (HOH/FOOKS); NSC FOR  
BRAUN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/29/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KAWC](#) [KJUS](#) [MARR](#) [BK](#)

SUBJECT: BOSNIA - SREBRENICA'S CITIZENS LIKELIEST LOSERS IN  
SECESSION TUG-OF-WAR

REF: A. SARAJEVO 606  
[1](#)B. SARAJEVO 579  
[1](#)C. SARAJEVO 556  
[1](#)D. SARAJEVO 456  
[1](#)E. SARAJEVO 362

Classified By: DCM Judith B. Cefkin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Long ignored by state and entity politicians, Srebrenica Municipality is now the subject of a tug-of-war pitting political interests of the country's leading Bosniak politicians against those of Srebrenica's local community. In the wake of the ICJ verdict, calls for Srebrenica's secession from the Republika Srpska (RS) continue to escalate. At an extraordinary session of the Srebrenica Municipal Council, Bosniak representatives unilaterally resolved to secede from the RS if conditions for special status are not met by the July 11, 12th anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre. The Office of the High Representative has reviewed the resolution and declared that it "exceeds the responsibilities of the municipality" and warned against taking any unilateral action on separation. This resolution has exacerbated the tensions over and in Srebrenica. Many residents distrust the methods used by the Initiative Board for the Special Status of Srebrenica and tell us that outsiders are driving the special status debate. The focus on status has come at the expense of what community leaders tell us are residents' main concerns - social and economic conditions in the municipality. Moderate groups we have talked to doubt local citizens will benefit from secession from the RS and are angry with attempts by Bosniak politicians Haris Silajdzic and Sulejman Tihic to exploit conditions in Srebrenica for personal political gain. Unfortunately, moderate voices have been drowned out in the current debate over Srebrenica. END SUMMARY.

TENSIONS CONTINUE IN SREBRENICA AS BOSNIAKS ISSUE ULTIMATUM  
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[1](#)2. (U) At an extraordinary meeting of Srebrenica's Municipal Council on March 24, the Council's 17 Bosniaks unanimously passed an 8-point resolution calling for the secession of Srebrenica from the RS. (Note: The 10 Serb members walked out of the session in protest before the vote. End Note.) The resolution, drafted prior to the session by members of the "Initiative Board for Special Status of Srebrenica," ("Initiative Board") gives the Republika Srpska National Assembly (RSNA) and the BiH Parliament a deadline of July 11, 2007 (the 12th anniversary of the Srebrenica Massacre) to

implement special status for the municipality. If the deadline is not met, the resolution calls on Srebrenica's citizens to emigrate from the municipality en masse. Srebrenica Mayor Abduraham Malkic, who was not at the session, indicated beforehand that he strongly opposed the resolution. Bosniak political leaders, including Party For BiH (SBiH) Member of the Tri-Presidency Haris Silajdzic and Party for Democratic Action (SDA) President Sulejman Tihic welcomed the Council's Action. (Note: Only four of Srebrenica's 27 council members actually live in Srebrenica. The majority of Bosniak councilors live in Sarajevo and Tuzla and commute to Srebrenica for official purposes. The remaining Serb councilors live elsewhere in the RS, and one actually lives in neighboring Serbia. End Note.)

13. (U) After the meeting, Serb council members requested that the RSNA and RS government immediately establish provisional administration in the municipality, and a group calling themselves the "Initiative Board for the Preservation of Srebrenica within the RS" issued its own proclamation of 10 items condemning the Bosniak resolution and calling for countermeasures. This group is supported by the Serb Orthodox Church, Serb War Veterans, and the Association of Srebrenica Citizens. These 10 items will be forwarded to the Srebrenica Municipal Council for adoption. RS politicians, including Prime Minister Milorad Dodik, warned that the Municipal Council's resolution violates RS law and is "anti-Dayton." The RS, meanwhile, has adopted a package of measures to make Srebrenica a zone of special developmental attention. The Office of the High Representative (OHR) issued a statement on March 27 expressing concern over the Municipal Council's secession threat and warned that if the municipality does so, the High Representative "would have no

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choice but to take robust action."

INITIATIVE BOARD FOR SPECIAL STATUS - STIRRING THE POT  
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14. (C) In a March 26 meeting in Srebrenica, Initiative Board members Camil Durakovic (Bosnian-American), Sadik Ahmetovic (SDA), Hakiya Meholic (SDP) and Hatidza Mehmedovic (Srebrenica Mother) told us that they will not be satisfied until Srebrenica is removed from the RS and given status as a special district. Although the Initiative Board originally gained support by advocating for socio-economic changes in Srebrenica, the Board now says that without special district status outside the RS, the only option left for Srebrenica's citizens will be mass emigration. When asked why socio-economic improvements in Srebrenica without secession would be insufficient, Board members argued that keeping Srebrenica within the RS condones the genocide committed there. Board members asserted they have a critical mass of supporters for their "cause" and showed us a petition for special status they claimed had been signed by some 500 local residents.

15. (C) Durakovic also argued that the U.S. has a moral and legal obligation to support Srebrenica's secession based on international treaty obligations and a 1993 Congressional resolution stating that genocide was occurring in Srebrenica. Durakovic added that he has retained attorneys who specialize in international law in order to review any U.S. obligations. (Note: Durakovic, a dual Bosnian and American citizen, had been living near Boston since early childhood, but returned to Bosnia in the last year. He is currently employed by Srebrenica's municipal administration. Durakovic presents himself as a champion of Srebrenica Bosniaks, but most locals see him as an interloper and question his presence in Srebrenica. End Note.)

"PARTICULARLY IN SREBRENICA, THERE ARE NO WINNERS"  
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16. (U) In an effort to magnify what they assert is

Srebrenica's moderate "silent majority," a network of Srebrenica's local NGOs, comprised of Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats, issued a statement to Bosnian and international officials criticizing the Initiative Board for dividing Srebrenica's citizens. The group stressed the importance of "coexistence in Srebrenica" and warned that the current dialogue was driving residents back into "their ethnic trenches." Citing the efforts of Srebrenica's citizens over the past 12 years to establish trust, build civil society and promote human rights, the group called upon their elected representatives to "bear the responsibility to prove that the only way to guarantee peace in this region is to take care of your neighbors and their requests and needs" and that "the road of BiH and the RS is the road of European integration."

17. (C) In a March 26 meeting with us, the NGO network said the situation in Srebrenica has been polarized by political forces who do not have Srebrenica's citizens' best interests in mind. The NGO network hopes to take a stand against efforts to undermine the town's peaceful and multi-ethnic atmosphere. Members of the NGO groups indicated to us that Srebrenica's citizens live peacefully side by side and have no interest in resettlement or inflammatory political maneuvering, but that they fear recent events have increased nationalistic tendencies -- especially among the municipality's youth. They also scoffed at the idea that Srebrenica's citizens would leave en masse, joking that those who chose to stay in or return to Srebrenica after the war would not have done so if they had anywhere else to go.

18. (C) NGO representatives and others in Srebrenica we talked with question why the municipal authorities did not hold a town meeting or invite local citizens into the special status discussion. Srebrenica's citizens support proposals to improve economic and social conditions in the municipality (i.e., defining special status as an enterprise or other type of economic zone), but would not have necessarily endorsed the Municipal Council's threat to secede from the RS. In the wake of the Council's vote, residents feel alienated from the discussion and see the current debate as driven by outsiders and imposed upon them. According to groups with which we

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spoke, they distrust the Initiative Board's motives.  
(Comment: Undoubtedly, many of Srebrenica's Bosniaks would prefer that the municipality be part of a unitary Bosnian state rather than the RS, but most are realistic about the prospects for changes to the Dayton territorial settlement.  
End Comment.)

19. (C) NGO leaders believe the Initiative Board preyed on the most vulnerable members of Srebrenica's 11,000 residents (elderly, poor, rural residents) to secure their signatures on its petitions. Moderate community leaders complained to us that they are tired of politicians hoping to "make" their career by spinning Srebrenica into turmoil to the detriment of its citizens who want to live ordinary lives. They also wonder why Mayor Malkic, generally well-liked and respected by his constituents, has not more forcefully challenged the Council, and they question whether Malkic is under pressure from political higher-ups (i.e., SDA President Tihic) to support a more radical line. Despite their frustration, NGOs, journalists and others we talked to indicated that they are hesitant to challenge radical voices because they fear retribution from municipal authorities. Instead, some residents hinted that they have been stocking food and cleaning guns "just in case" things in Srebrenica take a dangerous turn.

COMMENT  
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110. (C) After initially claiming to be concerned about the socio-economic condition of all of Srebrenica's citizens, the Initiative Board now argues its sole goal is secession from the RS. Sarajevo-based Bosniak politicians, particularly

Silajdzic and Tihic, have also placed much greater emphasis on the territorial issue than on practical steps they could support to help the municipality's population. Silajdzic undoubtedly sees in Srebrenica an opportunity to further radicalize Bosniak sentiment in the country and to advance his goal of abolishing the RS. However, Srebrenica is an SDA, not an SBiH stronghold. While Silajdzic may be the ideological godfather of the secessionist movement, it is notable that SDA councilors rammed the March 26 resolution through the Council. Zlatko Lagumdzija's Social Democratic Party has also played an unhelpful role in Srebrenica. Malkic remains a moderating influence, but his ability to shape events on the ground is unclear. Perhaps most disturbing, the special status virus may be spreading. Politicians in Prijedor and part of Posavina have suggested that their municipalities should also have special status.

END COMMENT.

MCELHANEY